

Punishment Doesn't Work



Your dog tips over the kitchen trash can whenever she's left alone. You scold her when you get home, but she continues to dump the trash. Only now she cowers and has that "guilty" look when you arrive home. Well, she obviously knows she's doing wrong, right? Wrong.

Those "guilty" looks are only submissive postures to show that she knows you are angry, but she does not know why. She's going to associate your anger with whatever she was just doing - like the enthusiastic greeting she gave you at the door the moment before you yelled at her.

That is why punishment is such an impractical and sometimes damaging way of training your pets. For punishment to be effective, you have to catch your pet in the act every time she does it -- and that's not easy to do.

You'll have more success modifying your pet's behavior if you simply change the environment so the "bad" behavior is no longer fun. Move the trash can so your pet can't reach it or put a lid on it so he can't get into it. The same applies to house soiling, chewing or scratching. If your cat is scratching your favorite couch, change the texture (if it is rough, put something smooth over it) or make it smell bad to your cat with muscle rubs or perfumes. Then put her scratching post next to the couch and reward her whenever she uses it. If your cats are chewing your houseplants, coat the leaves with a bitter, pet-safe substance. Make sure you give them their own plants to chew on and reward them for eating those.

Even though pets are not people, we do share a preference for pleasant things. Instead of stopping "bad" behaviors, start thinking about how to get your pet to do "good" behaviors so you can reward her.